

SECOND PARTING

How the Short-Mayo Composite Separated "In Public"

A SECOND big moment for Mr. Lankester Parker and Mr. H. L. Piper (and also, of course, for Major Mayo and all those connected with the Short-Mayo composite aircraft) passed successfully and uneventfully on Wednesday, February 23. The first—the impromptu separation of *Mercury* and *Maia*—had been accomplished on a Sunday afternoon with no critical spectators watching every move. The second occasion, before a battery of cameras and Pressmen, both flying and earth-bound, demanded prearranged separation at a given position and at a low altitude.

In the original Mayo scheme parting at 10,000ft. or more is visualised, so that Wednesday's demonstration was purely a spectacular proof of the sponsors' trust in the scheme.

All eight engines, Bristols and Napier, started without hesitation. As Mr. J. Lankester Parker taxied *Maia-Mercury* past Short Brothers' Rochester Works, accompanied in the control cabin by Capt. A. S. Wilcockson (pilot of *Calendonia* on her first and several subsequent Atlantic crossings) cine cameras began to whirr. For a moment it seemed likely that a slow-moving tug towing a cluster of barges would hold up the take-off, but before its wash had caught the less wary spectators off their guard, eight airscrews whirled into misty discs and the composite was accelerating towards the big crowd outside the works.

Off

After making a wide circuit with the photographer-crammed Empire boat *Corinna* in close company, the composite headed towards the works again. Then, just short of the river, and at 600-700ft., *Mercury* popped off *Maia*'s back with quite astounding suddenness. One blinked and doubted one's visual impression of the previous moment. Had the now separate machines really been one? As soon as they were apart *Mercury* seemed to rise vertically, with her nose perhaps a little up, while *Maia* dropped away nose-down, neither gaining a noticeable lead until they were fully 50ft. apart, when *Mercury* went ahead.

Maia came in at once, landing elegantly and taxied away to her moorings across the water; *Mercury*, perhaps to use a little petrol, or more probably to await her turn to alight, made several rapid, low-altitude circuits at well over 200 m.p.h., with the four Rapiers whining characteristically.

Mr. Lankester Parker said that the first indication that *Mercury* was free was the loud click as the third hook released. He summed up the separation in the words "I think the chief thing we discovered was that it wasn't a fluke the first time." *Mercury*'s excess lift at the moment of parting was something like 7,000lb.

These extracts from the "British Movietone" slow-motion film of the separation tell the story vividly; especially do they show the steadiness of attitude in both units after separation. These pictures are not a continuous extract; they are selected from some eight feet of film.

